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ABSTRACT

Congruence among the opinions of students, staff, and parents of a Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school system was investigated to determine perceptions of the relative power of the decision-making influentials to affect the allocation of system resources and to affect the implementation of programs. Six hypotheses were postulated concerning the congruence of opinions among students, parents, and staff. A modified issue analysis technique was utilized for purposes of identifying system influentials, and respondents were asked to state their opinions as to the relative influence of influential actors or groups in relation to ten stimulus statements. The six hypotheses were rejected at the .01 level of confidence, as the respondent groups differed significantly in their responses to the opinionnaire statements. Data indicated: (1) lack of congruence among respondents regarding the relative power of the decision-making influentials in affecting both resource allocations and program implementation; (2) students, staff, and parents viewed various actors and groups in the suprasystem as being most influential in the decision-making process and viewed themselves as being least influential; (3) students and parents viewed the advisory school board as being among the most influential of groups; (4) school staff viewed the advisory board as having little influence. (JC)

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PERCEPTIONS OF POWER INFLUENTIALS IN A

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FEDERAL INDIAN SCHOOL

BY

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Introduction - The direction of education for the Indian community is of great concern to Indian people and to the Federal government. An analysis of the educational decision-making process in a Federal Indian school system has pertinence to an understanding of that system. System theory provided the framework for this study of one Federal Indian school system. The interactions of indigenous and external power influentials of the system can be understood by looking at the system in its wholeness. The perceptions, as to process, of the various client actors in the system will give clues as to their actions, reactions, and interactions within the system.

This study examined the decision-making influentials and the relative power of these decision-making influentials as viewed by professionals, students non-professional employees and parents, in a Bureau of Indian Affairs

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boarding school. The issues on which decision makers were rated were those of allocation of resources and implementation of program. A case study involving the naming of a new chief school administrator was constructed by the researcher in order to identify influentials in the school. A system-analytic approach to an Indian boarding school was used as the conceptual framework of the study.

The findings indicated that the hierarchical structure of the BIA influenced decision making most powerfully in the school, with the principal seen as having little influence. Congress and the Executive branch were deemed the most influential elements in the decision making chain. Those groups perceived as having little influence were the Indian advisory school board, tribal groups, the State Department of Education, teachers, students, and least of all parents.

Summary of the Investigation. The purpose of this study of a Federal Indian school system was to investigate the relationships among the opinions of students, staff, and parents of the school concerning (1) the relative power of the decision-making influentials to affect the allocation of system resources and (2) the relative power of the decision-making influentials to affect the implementation of programs. Six hypotheses were postulated concerning the congruence of opinions of the students, parents, and staff of a selected

Indian school system, as follows:

1. The students and staff have congruent opinions regarding the relative power of the decision-making influentials in affecting the allocation of system resources.

2. The students and parents have congruent opinions regarding the relative power of the decision-making influentials in affecting the allocation of system resources.

3. The staff and parents have congruent opinions regarding the relative power of the decision-making influentials in affecting the allocation of system resources.

4. The students and staff have congruent opinions regarding the relative power of the decision-making influentials in affecting the implementation of programs.

5. The students and parents have congruent opinions regarding the relative power of the decision-making influentials in affecting the implementation of programs.

6. The staff and parents have congruent opinions regarding the relative power of the decision-making influentials in affecting the implementation of programs.

Using a modified issue analysis technique for the purpose of identifying system influentials, a list of influential actors and groups was used by the investigator as the basis for constructing an opinionnaire. The opinionnaire was administered to samples of students, staff, and parents. The respondents were asked to state their

opinions as to the relative influence of influential actors or groups in relation to ten stimulus statements. In a forced choice technique, the respondents were given ten to twenty possible choices for each stimulus statement and were asked to rank, in order, the three most influential actors or groups and the three least influential actors or groups. The responses were weighted, ranked, and analyzed. Chi-squares were obtained for the students/staff, students/parents, and staff/parents data and conclusions were made to retain or reject the null hypotheses.

The six hypotheses were rejected at the .01 level of confidence. The respondent groups (students, parents and staff of a Federal Indian school) differed significantly in their responses to the opinionnaire statements.

The data indicated that there was a lack of congruence in the opinions of students, staff, and parents of a Federal Indian school, regarding the relative power of the decision-making influentials in affecting the (1) allocation of system resources and (2) the implementation of programs.

The data further indicated that generally the students, staff, and parents of a Federal Indian school system view various actors and groups in the suprasystem as being the most influential in the decision-making process and view themselves as having the least influence in the decision-making process. Another significant finding was

that the students and parents view the advisory school board as being among the top influentials while the school staff view the advisory school board as having little influence.

Conclusions. The general conclusions of this study of a Federal Indian school system were:

1. System theory provides concepts which are useful for a study of Federal Indian school systems.
2. Students, staff, and parents in a Federal Indian school system have non-congruent opinions regarding the relative power of the decision-making influentials who affect the allocation of money to the school system.
3. Students, staff, and parents in a Federal Indian school system have non-congruent opinions regarding the relative power of the decision-making influentials who affect the allocation of students to the school system.
4. Students, staff, and parents in a Federal Indian school system have non-congruent opinions regarding the relative power of the decision-making influentials who affect the allocation of staff to the school system.

5. Students, staff, and parents in a Federal Indian school system have non-congruent opinions regarding the relative power of the decision-making influentials who affect how money is spent in the implementation of programs.

6. Students, staff, and parents in a Federal Indian school system have non-congruent opinions regarding the relative power of the decision-making influentials who affect the implementation of curriculum programs.

7. Generally, the students, staff, and parents of a Federal Indian school system view various actors or groups in the suprasystem as being the most influential in the decision-making process and perceive themselves as being the least influential in the system.

8. The students, staff, and parents perceive the chief school administrator (superintendent) as being among the most influential in the decision-making process; however, the principal and supervisors are perceived as having little influence.

9. The students and parents perceive the advisory school board as being among the most influential in the system while the staff members perceive the advisory school board as being among the least influential.

10. The state in which the Federal Indian school is located is viewed by the students, staff, and parents as having influence only on the curriculum.

Implications. In order to promote improvement of decision-making in the Bureau of Indian Affairs Federal school system, there exists a need to understand the human interactions which affect and influence the decisions. There is a need to understand the group and social behavior exhibited by the system actors, particularly the power influentials who go about the business of moving others to act and to behave in a way that differs from that which they would otherwise exhibit.

The Indian school administrator is better prepared to cope with the decision situations if he understands the reality of the influence of power influentials indigenous and external to the education social system. Understanding the impact of system, suprasystem, and subsystem influentials, the school administrator can decide on alternative actions to reduce dysfunctional stress, disorganization and entropy in the school system.

In addition, if the Indian school administrator discovers non-congruent opinions and relationships, it appears logical to this investigator that sound management requires that corrective actions be taken to resolve identified problem areas for the purpose of reducing non-productive rancorous

conflict and for increasing program productivity.

This investigation produced findings which have important implications for the Bureau of Indian Affairs school systems if the generalization is made that many others of the nearly 200 Indian school systems have similar conditions. These implications are:

1. In examining three subsystems (students, staff, and parents), the data showed a lack of congruent opinions concerning various facets of the Indian school system. The basis is laid then for dysfunctional tension, rancorous conflict, and non-rational behavior in the system. Theoretically, educational institutions are relatively open systems as opposed to closed systems. If these three important subsystems are in fact non-congruent in their perceptions, the question arises as to whether these subsystems are pointed toward entropy or disorganization which leads to being a non-producing system. The discerning Indian school administrator must take note of this, plan corrective action, and decide whether conflicting viewpoints are destructive or constructive.

2. The school subsystems of students, staff, and parents, perceive the suprasystem as being the chief decision-maker and perceive themselves as relatively powerless. The Indian school administrator needs to be aware of this possible

cause for program apathy and ineffectiveness. Lack of program support and cohesiveness of efforts could result from the feelings of impotence and helplessness on the part of the client subsystems. If in fact the feelings of powerlessness prevails in other Indian school systems as it does in this system under study, then one of the dysfunctional consequences could be a decrease in quality output from the system. The reason is that a student enters the system as an input and is supposed to be changed when he leaves the system. However, the student may not be changed, or he may not view the system as his own. He may view it as an alien system resulting in a contest situation.

3. The subsystems of students, parents, and staff perceive the principal as having little influence. This has alarming implications as the principal in Federal Indian schools has the role of director of learning and the facilitator and developer of curriculum. If he, too, is powerless, then this affects the system outputs, the supposedly changed students.

4. The effect of students feeling powerless in the system could result not only in apathy, or alienation, but also in a lack of cooperation in the learning process. The effect of parents feeling powerless in the system could result in a lack of parental and tribal support of the school. The effect of teachers and other staff members perceiving themselves as having little influence also leads to overt or covert resistance to program efforts. On crediting the suprasystem influentials as being the responsible decision-makers, students, staff, and parents can deny responsibility for program consequences, especially if there is failure.

5. In one area, the influence of the advisory school board; the students and parents see eye-to-eye. However, the staff is quite firm in denying the advisory school board influence. This denotes a possible lack of responsiveness on the part of the staff to the prevailing suprasystem policy of Indian self-determination and involvement of Indians in all programs which affect their welfare. This viewpoint has important implications to staff union reactions regarding Civil Service Commission rights.

The basis is laid for conflict situations if the staff sees goals originating from the suprasystem actors or groups while the students and parents see goals originating from the client subsystems.

6. The weakness of local administrators and of clients is marked in this study as being a malaise of a bureaucratic educational organization. If client groups view themselves as weak in influence, and if they view local administrators as low in influence, negotiation processes concerning goals, learning resources, program, and outcomes could be seen as a waste of time. So in an educational bureaucracy where the real influence is at the top, clients must go as far toward the top as possible to secure a hearing and obtain some kind of change in the system. Frustration at the grass roots, associated with meaningless gestures of participation, leads to direct actions, confrontations, and contest situations. Reform of decision-making machinery in the system is long overdue. A look at the educational decision-making process in Indian school systems should lead to further restructuring of the organizational structures or to legislative mandate in order to change the system.

Recommendations. The conclusions and implications lead to the following recommendations.

1. That social system theory and general system theory be used as a theoretical framework for the investigation of Indian educational systems. System theory provides concepts for stating hypotheses regarding the plurality of human actors interacting within and without the school social systems.

2. That, within system theory, additional research be undertaken as related to Indian school systems, on open and close systems, on circular feedback mechanisms, on input-process-output implications, and on the difficult problem of measuring system output.

3. That a complete system analysis be made of the Bureau of Indian Affairs school system.

4. That the Bureau of Indian Affairs educational managers consider restructuring its school system, particularly in the areas of (1) clarification and strengthening of the role of the school board; (2) assisting parents to interact with school staff; (3) searching for ways for the staff and client groups of students and parents to build goals together; and building new models for local Indian control of the educational efforts on behalf of Native American Youth.

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